

THE WORLD BANK MISSION REPORT ON EDUCATION

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The World Bank Mission Report contains conclusions and recommendations on our educational system which deserve serious consideration. The Mission considers that Ceylon's economic development will depend on the efficiency with which the human resources of the country can be applied to the natural resources within it. It mentions the following defects as chief difficulties in the way of our economic development:-

- A continuing disinclination among the people to enter many non-agricultural occupations and a tendency to avoid job-changing; and
- A lack of responsibility and initiative which is the outcome of political subordination to foreign powers for over three centuries which inevitably led to a habit of expecting major decisions to be taken thousands of miles away. The Mission finds that related commercial activity is directed and financed mainly by the non-Ceylonese, and that even improved water supplies, community building programmes, road works and many other possible community ventures have depended on outside stimulus.

The Mission also finds that there is an acute shortage of trained personnel which extends all the way from manual skills through supervisory abilities, to managerial and engineering talents. It concludes that the root causes of these defects has been, firstly the authoritarianism of the home which discourages initiative, self-confidence, experimentation and enquiring habits of mind and secondly the authoritarianism of the school which imparts knowledge to the pupils having no relation to their needs in later life. So that for too many young Ceylonese, "the ideal job consists in sitting at a desk and telling others what to do."

Authoritarianism is shown to be a dominant factor in the curriculum as well as in the methods of prevalent education. The inadequate attention paid to the arts and crafts, and health and hygiene is described as the deficiency of our curriculum and this is attributed among other things to the academic character of the old British system on which our schools were modelled.

The Mission observes that most children need to be made ready, so far as the schools can make them ready, for life as farmers or as auxiliaries for farmers, by giving appropriate emphasis to science with a rural accent and to practical work in cultivation, whereas other pupils, who are to take their place in industry or in certain government departments need to become acquainted with the use of wood-working and metal-working tools, with simple carpentry or elementary mechanics. However the Mission sounds a note of warning that specific industrial or vocational training should not be

introduced in the primary or even the secondary grades. That would mean overspecialization. The Mission definitely favours a balanced education, on the ground that the pupil has hands as well as brain and that he cannot achieve complete self expression without work in the crafts and in the arts.

But the Mission holds that our educational system is weak in training children to apply their knowledge. It condemns the stress that is laid on reproduction of what has been learned. It also condemns the methods of education as well as the content of the curriculum which have been dominated by examinations, in particular by examinations which test fitness for further study and which have come to be used even as criteria for employments. The Mission recommends that cramming the pupil with facts should give way to training him in orderly thinking.

To remedy this cardinal defect, the Mission suggests, "Ideally, it would probably be well to abolish all "fitness" tests until the university level is reached. There, a qualifying entrance examination, taken only by those deserving to attend the university would probably still be needed. As for the great majority of pupils, their fitness to proceed with further education, as well as the degree of their attainment, could be measured perfectly adequately - as it is in many other countries - by their record in school."

I heartily endorse this view. If it is put into operation, we shall no more hear of the massacre of candidates and the excessive importance attached to examinations.

It is a pity that just at the time when World Bank Mission Report condemns the over-linguistic tradition of our educational system, a cry is raised to teach two languages from the kindergarten upwards which is bound to keep alive the system of cram and neglect the needs of the child as well as the needs of the country.

The Mission is quite clear on this point that "cramming the pupil with facts should give away to training him in orderly thinking. Facts can be stored in hand books; reasoning ability cannot."

The Mission thinks that to set as the goal of education the development of the capacity for independent thought involves a reform in education that is absolutely basic. It must start with the training of teachers.

Numerous techniques for developing reasoning ability are recommended:

1. In all subjects, recitation from memory is to be replaced by discussion, even in the early stages. This introduces personal experience, links it with instruction and suggests applications.
2. Widespread use of problems, carefully chosen for their realism and interest.
3. Field trips to relate schoolroom study of citizenship, geography, biology and rural science to the facts of real life.

4. Arts and crafts constantly pose problems of an individual character, not capable of being solved by reference to a textbook, but requiring the exercise of some originality or ingenuity.

Thereupon the World Bank Mission emphasises the conditions for developing reasoning ability. In the matter of education, we have been too long swayed by external characteristics such as gorgeous buildings, impressive results at examinations or competitions and various forms which the isolation of the school from the home has taken. The Mission has drawn pointed attention to what education should mean in a free country. Nevertheless, the Mission does not proceed beyond the techniques for the development of thought. There is, of course, the very basis of thought itself.

A famous educational thinker, Graham Wallas, among others, deals with this fundamental topic in his "Art of Thought." According to him the student's personal experience with his people, problems in his environment that awaken his interest, the facts of his real life are all indissolubly interwoven with the Swabhasa and as such the Swabhasa constitutes the vehicle of his reasoning abilities and original thought. That is to say, unless and until the activities of personal discussions and participation of pupils in a common experience of learning (which are recommended by the Mission to replace the cramming attitude towards education) adopt Swabhasa as their medium, I am afraid the over-linguistic tradition with its stress on reproduction, rather than application of knowledge, will persist, and as a result it will not be possible for our economic development to use adequately human resources of enterprise and initiative.

The Mission commends the authorities for continuing practical and academic work side by side at the senior Secondary level. It welcomes the elimination of the fitness test at the end of the primary stage and urges the abolition of a selective test at the end of the junior secondary stage. When so much is written nowadays about the selective test, the recommendations of the Mission to eliminate it should engage public attention. There can be no doubt that the selective test can serve no useful purpose. There are no practical schools to receive the bulk of the pupils who are found unfit for academic education. All that is needed is additional vocational training institutes, along the lines of the one at Ratmalana for the benefit of school-leavers at 14 plus.

To ensure the reasonably early attainment of a trained corps of teachers, the Mission urges the enlargement of the physical and human facilities of training colleges to permit the graduation of approximately 2300 trained teachers each year.

The Mission, too, thinks that Ceylon has still a long way to go to attain the proportion of university-trained population of more advanced countries. And to meet the immediate needs of Ceylon, the Mission too urges the expansion of the Department of Engineering and Agriculture in the University of Ceylon.